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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Answers to Questions

ABOUT THE AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO
BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL
PEOPLE

PA 293

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Conservation Program Service

Your Stake in Conservation!

Every one of us depends on agricultural soil and water resources for food, clothing and shelter. Most of us also depend on these farm (including ranch) resources, directly or indirectly, for our own income.

You teachers, ministers, specialists, and other professional people are directly interested in the welfare of farmers (including ranchers) and their families. Their income from agricultural resources is important to you.

You who sell seed, feed, fertilizer, insecticide, machinery, gasoline, credit and other goods or services to farmers are directly concerned with farm production and income. Over two-thirds of farmers' cash receipts from farm marketings go to pay such production expenses.

You warehousemen, transporters, processors, salesmen, and others who handle farm products after they leave the farm depend directly on agricultural production. About two-thirds of the bill consumers pay for farm products as a whole goes to pay for your services.

You manufacturers who depend on farm and ranch resources for raw materials also are directly affected. Seventy percent of the dollar value of all raw materials going into American industry and commerce comes from agricultural resources—croplands, grazing lands, and forests.

From an income standpoint then, most of us want a stable continuing agricultural production. All of us must be concerned with the agricultural resources needed to supply the food, clothing, shelter, and much of the income for a growing population.

Agricultural water and land resources must be used, managed, and conserved in the public interest. Conservation measures must be applied to farm land. Conservation farming is more than just good farming. Over the years, conservation assures a good living to farmers and through them to all. But conservation measures on individual farms can only be done by the man who controls the land.

However, some conservation measures return benefits only after many years. Others do not benefit the farmer on whose land the work is done, or the returns may be insufficient to repay the cost. Also, there often is a temporary decline in a farmer's income during the time he is establishing a conservation system of farming.

For such reasons as these, farmers may not apply all the conservation needed in the public's interest.

To help farmers do conservation needed to protect our interest, the Government furnishes several kinds of conservation services. Included are research, education, technical assistance, credit and cost-

sharing. These conservation services supplement those furnished through State and local governments and private organizations.

Thus in conservation, as in many other matters of public concern, Government provides a means for accomplishments that could not be achieved by individual effort.

This leaflet helps answer questions about the Agricultural Conservation Program, one of the services of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The farmer committees referred to in this leaflet as the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) Committees were created by Congress in Section 8(b) of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, as amended. Former names of these Committees were: Production and Marketing Administration (PMA) Committees, Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) Committees, and Agricultural Conservation Association (ACA) Committees. The ASC Committees are directed by the Commodity Stabilization Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A Farmer-Government Partnership

1. Q. What is the Agricultural Conservation Program?

A. The ACP is a national conservation service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It shares with farmers and ranchers the costs of practices needed for conserving cropland, range and pasture, orchard land, farm woodlots, and agricultural water.

The ACP is a farmer-Government partnership. Public funds are authorized by Congress as an investment to encourage farmers to also invest in doing now the conservation work that is in the public interest.

2. Q. Is the ACP a new program?

A. No. The ACP has been in continuous operation since 1936. It has assisted farmers and ranchers to make land use adjustments by establishing needed grass, legume and tree cover. It has also continuously assisted farmers and ranchers to install the various soil and water conserving measures needed in addition to those required for adjustment in land use. The program is flexible so that emphasis may be placed on those conservation measures most needed at any time to protect and improve soil and water resources.

3. Q. Must practices carried out under ACP be technically sound?

A. Yes. ACP practices are based on the best ways known for solving conservation problems. To make sure that practices will be done properly, necessary specifications are set up based on Experiment Station research, field experience of scientifically trained technicians, and experience and observation of the farmer committees. Technical services for those ACP practices which require them are provided for the ACP primarily through the Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service.

State Agricultural Experiment Stations usually provide soil-testing facilities to determine fertilizer and mineral needs. State Extension Services through their specialists and county agents also give advisory services in connection with some practices.

Conservation Services and Their Relationship

4. Q. What are some of the services that help farmers get conservation done?

A. Assistance needed and used by farmers in planning and doing conservation includes: Technical services, ACP cost-sharing, credit, supplies and special equipment. Additional preparatory services include research in conservation methods and problems, and educational work to help farmers understand conservation problems and

how to remedy them. One or more of these services are involved in almost every conservation activity.

5. Q. How are these conservation services made available to farmers?

A. These conservation services are furnished through Federal, State, and local Government agencies, and private businesses, and sometimes through joint efforts. In all conservation on private land, farmers make major contributions.

6. Q. How do these services influence conservation? How are they related to each other?

A. *Research* provides a sound basis for conservation activities. Through *education* farmers are made aware of the need for conservation, furnished necessary information, instructed in ways to solve their conservation problems, and taught skills they need themselves. Some conservation practices require skills which a farmer usually does not have, so professionally trained *technical help* is made available. Adequate *supplies* of such things as seed, tree stock, and minerals, and the services of *equipment*, including contractual services, to do specialized operations are necessities for conservation work on farms.

Lack of capital to buy needed materials or pay for special services is a major obstacle to accomplishing conservation. As one of its benefits, ACP *cost-sharing* partially meets this need for capital. The availability of *credit* may also determine whether a conservation project is carried out when needed.

All of these services are inter-related. If one of them is needed but not available, the conservation work probably will not be done. One or more of these services are needed in every conservation practice and no one of them can accomplish maximum results without the other services also being adequate.

ACP Comes From the Grass Roots

7. Q. How has the ACP been developed?

A. The ACP was first developed by community and county groups of farmers and specialists recommending practices to meet local conservation problems. These suggestions were summarized by State groups and used to develop a national agricultural conservation program. Local programs were then set up within the national program. Since that time, the ACP has been reviewed and adjusted annually.

8. Q. How is the ACP adjusted to meet changing conditions?

A. Each year the ACP and its accomplishments are reviewed, in light of changing conditions, and recommendations are made to improve it. This is done county by county, State by State, and nationally, with many agencies and organizations taking part. County and State groups have the responsibility for this ACP annual review. The ACP National Bulletin reflects the results of the annual review.

9. Q. How is the ACP administered?

A. Congress authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to direct the ACP and the use of its annual appropriation. The Agricultural Conservation Program Service administers the program nationally for the Secretary. It is one of the programs handled by State and County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) Committees of farmers. These Committees employ small staffs to handle the ACP and other assigned programs.

The assistance of specialists is available to State and County Committees for phases of the ACP work where it is needed. There are opportunities for consultation between those administering the program and professional workers in all fields of conservation. This consultation is encouraged.

10. Q. What is an ASC County Committee, a County ACP Group? An ASC State Committee and a State ACP Group?

A. A County Committee is composed of three farmers elected annually from among those eligible to participate in any of the programs administered by the Committee. The County Extension Agent is a member of the Committee unless he is secretary to it. The County ACP Group is composed of the ASC Committee, the SCS technician, and the FS representative, who consult with local representatives of other State, Federal and private agricultural agencies and organizations such as Soil Conservation Districts and local representatives of State Forestry Departments.

A State Committee is made up of farmers (usually three) appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. The State Agricultural Extension Director is a member of the State Committee. The State ACP Group is composed of the ASC State Committee, the SCS State Conservationist, and the FS representative, who consult with representatives of other State, Federal and private agricultural agencies and organizations.

The Committees and Groups have certain responsibilities which are set out in the ACP National Bulletin.

11. Q. What are the ACP duties of an ASC State Committee?

A. A State Committee is responsible for administering the program within its State. It allocates funds among the counties, helps County Committees fulfill their ACP responsibilities, and reviews county ACP actions. The State Committee reports to the ACPS and, in turn, passes back to the County Committees, the national program policies. They also have certain specific duties in the operation of the program.

12. Q. What are the ACP duties of an ASC County Committee?

- A. A County Committee has three primary ACP responsibilities:
- (a) To see that the public interest is served by getting maximum conservation for the investment made.
 - (b) To see that farmer-neighbors know about and understand the program.

(c) To account for its stewardship during its term of office.

The Committee also has specific duties in the operation of the program.

13. Q. Who decides which conservation practices shall be available for ACP cost-sharing in the county program?

A. The County ACP Group is responsible for selecting the practices and setting the cost-sharing rates for those practices.

14. Q. Why is there different emphasis on an ACP practice (e.g., forestry) in one county than there is in another county?

A. The County ACP Group, within the limits of funds, chooses practices and establishes rates of cost-sharing on the basis of its understanding of local conditions and conservation problems.

15. Q. Who are ASC Community Committeemen?

A. They are farmers elected annually from among those in the community who are eligible to participate in any of the programs administered by the County Committee. Most of the larger agricultural counties are divided into communities for administrative purposes.

16. Q. What are the ACP duties of ASC Community Committeemen?

A. Community Committeemen assist their County Committee in developing and administering the local ACP. These duties may include keeping neighboring farmers and others in the community informed of the purpose of ACP and how it can be helpful. They are encouraged to be constantly on the alert for conservation problems for which ACP is needed, and for ways in which ACP can more effectively meet local conservation problems.

Farmers and ACP

17. Q. Who is eligible for ACP cost-sharing?

A. Any landowner, operator, tenant, or sharecropper who has a conservation problem which can't be met with his own resources may request the ASC County Committee to provide a share of the cost of needed conservation practices that are in the county ACP.

18. Q. How does a farmer or rancher get ACP cost-sharing?

A. He outlines his conservation problem to someone connected with the ASC County Office in the county where his farm is located. He chooses one or more practices in the county program which would help solve his conservation problem and indicates the number of units (acres, tons, cubic yards, etc.) of each practice for which he needs cost-sharing.

The County Committee considers his request in the light of the conservation needs on his farm in relation to needs of other farms in the county and the advisability of investing public funds to meet the request. If the request is granted in whole or in part, the farmer is

informed of the approval and of the actual amount of cost-share he will receive when the practice (or practices) is completed according to specifications.

19. Q. When should farmers make their request for ACP cost-sharing?

A. Requests must be made before work is started except for a few specific emergency practices. ASC County Committees may set time limits for requests to be made because of seasons and funds.

20. Q. What responsibility do farmers have when they participate in ACP?

A. They are responsible for:

- (a) A part of the cost of the practices.
- (b) In some cases, furnishing the equipment and labor involved.
- (c) Completing the practice according to specifications.
- (d) Complying with State laws and other regulatory measures that affect the practice.
- (e) Maintaining the practice.
- (f) Doing the related work necessary for the solution of the conservation problem.

21. Q. Is there a maximum cost-share individual farmers may receive under ACP?

A. Yes. Congress, in originally authorizing the ACP, set a limitation of \$10,000 as the maximum cost-share an individual may receive in one year. Subsequent Congressional authorizations have set varying limitations below this maximum. The ACP National Bulletin contains the current national limitation. State and County Committees may set a maximum lower than the national limit.

22. Q. When is the Government's share of the cost of the ACP conservation practice available to farmers?

A. Time of payment depends on how the cost-share is provided.

(a) Part or all of the Government's share of the cost may be by purchase order for materials and contractual services to be used in carrying out the practice. Funds are available for purchase orders at any time during the program year. Most counties provide the use of purchase orders.

(b) Or, the Government's share may be by a cash payment made to the farmer after the practice has been completed. Funds to make cash payments are not available until July 1 or later in the program year.

In either case, after completing the practice, a farmer files with the county office a report asking for payment of ACP cost-share. A United States Treasury check is subsequently mailed to him if a cash payment is due.

23. Q. Is every request for ACP cost-sharing approved?

A. No. Funds would rarely, if ever, permit an ASC County Com-

mittee to approve all requests. The County Committee considers each request on the basis of several things, including:

- (a) Urgency of conservation needed on an individual farm in terms of other conservation needs in the county.
- (b) Decision that public funds should be expended.
- (c) The availability of funds.

24. Q. Does ACP help a farmer pay for anything he wants to do?

A. No. ACP provides cost-sharing only for practices that conserve and protect agricultural soil and water resources, and that are in the county program.

25. Q. Is there some way farmers can work together to solve a conservation problem affecting more than one farm?

A. Yes. Two or more farmers with a common problem may enter into an agreement to pool their ACP cost-sharing to help solve a community conservation problem.

ACP Boosts All Conservation

26. Q. How does ACP cost-sharing apply to watershed or flood prevention projects?

A. Cost-sharing through ACP is available for most of the practices essential on individual farms in watershed improvement and flood prevention. Most practices included for cost-sharing in the ACP have direct value for flood prevention and proper watershed management. ACP complements, and may be used in, any special watershed management project for practices carried out on farm or range land.

27. Q. How is ACP used in connection with farm plans such as those developed with the help of Soil Conservation Districts, Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, Vocational Agriculture, Extension Service, State Foresters, commercial farm management agencies, or other similar groups?

A. ACP can be helpful in implementing the conservation phases of most farm plans. Farmers participating in ACP are encouraged to use ACP cost-sharing to carry out the conservation practices included in any farm or project plan they may have developed for their farms.

28. Q. What is the Naval Stores Conservation Program? How is it related to ACP?

A. This is a specialized program to conserve, through good management and production practices, the slash and longleaf pine trees producing naval stores products. The program is a part of the ACP, but is administered for the ACPS by the Forest Service in the six southeastern States producing naval stores.

29. Q. Does the ACP give consideration to protecting wildlife?

A. Yes. Certain practices permit selection of plantings or methods favorable to wildlife conservation even though the program is designed for other purposes.

30. Q. How is the ACP related to Soil Conservation Districts?

A. The objectives of the Districts and ACP are parallel. Therefore, ACP can be helpful to and used by farmers in a District to help carry out the District conservation program. The governing body of the District is a part of the County ACP Group which develops recommendations for the county ACP and is consulted when the county ACP is set up.

31. Q. Does ACP have objectives in common with interests of professional and business people working with farmers (e.g., teachers, engineers, bankers, foresters, agronomists, processors, manufacturers, implement, fertilizer, lime, and seed dealers, and others)? How can these groups make ACP more effective?

A. Anyone interested in better farming should know that ACP makes better farming possible through conservation. The ACP is a useful tool to further their own specific interests in better farming. The ACP helps protect the continuing productivity of farm resources of soil and water. It furnishes the cost-sharing assistance needed to supplement other Federal, State, local and private efforts to help farmers establish good systems of soil and water management and use. Through the ACP *more* conservation can be accomplished *sooner*.

Business and professional people who understand the objectives and provisions of ACP can encourage farmers who need its help to use it constructively. Thus, they can serve their own interests as well as serve the public interest by encouraging farmers to do needed conservation work.



